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Studies

NUMISMATICS

DIVVS AVGVSTVS AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE NORICO-PANNONIANS IN DACIA. COINS FROM OCNA SIBIULUI – FAȚA VACILOR / LA FĂGĂDĂU SITE

Abstract: The salt deposits from Ocna Sibiului contributed to the birth of some Roman settlements in this area. One of these, is the settlement from Ocna Sibiului – *Fața Vacilor/La Făgădău*, which belonged to the Norico-Pannonian settlers. In 2018 a wooden house was partially investigated during the excavations made in the section S 22, its research being finished in 2019 when a new section, S 24, was opened in the area. In S 24, on the house ground, a coin issued by Tiberius for Divus Augustus was found. In Dacia the majority of such coins are related with the first level of inhabitation, especially with Trajan's reign. This archaeological find is a clue which may suggest that the beginning of this settlement and the arriving of the Norico-Pannonians here have to be placed in the time of Emperor Trajan.

Keywords: *Norico-Pannonians, colonisation of Dacia, Divus Augustus coin, celtic settlement, Ocna Sibiului.*

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As always in the human history, mineral riches generated large prosperity for locals but also attracted foreign people and armies. Dacia's lavishness in minerals like gold, salt, copper, iron become legendary in the ancient world and stayed at the base of Dacian civilization, sustaining the rising of Dacians political power, but also provoking their downfall.

The Trajan's reign period couldn't have been such successful without the conquest of Dacia and the acquirement of its riches. Those proved to be essential for his military and civil policy. Right after the creation of the province, he tried to accelerate the exploit of Dacia's resources, one solution adopted being an intense colonization with various populace groups brought from different regions of the Empire. An important component in this process were the Celtic colonists who arrived in Dacia from Noricum and Pannonia¹. Their presence is well known in southern part of Transylvania, but was observed also in many other regions from Transylvania and Banat².

Even if those colonists came in Dacia with their customs and traditional way of life, many of them become Romanized. Despite their important impact in the colonization system of Dacia, the information regarding their settlements and preservation grade of the traditional customs are scarce

¹ HUSAR 1999, 107, 177; MAN 2011, 47-50; CHIRIAC 2016, 103-108; POPA 2002, 48-49, with bibliography.

² BENEĂ/REGEP 2018, 390-393.

especially due to the few archaeological research carried out in rural areas were the Celtic specific survived better and longer.

First systematically researched settlement of Celtic colonists from Dacia is located near Ocna Sibiului in the place called *Fața Vacilor / La Făgădău*. Here, the researches started in 2004³ and continued, with some interruptions, until now. Norico-pannonian presence in the Ocna Sibiului region seems to be close related to the salt deposits present here⁴, which were systematically exploit after Dacia was conquered by Trajan⁵. The settlement is very close to an important Roman road who connected the Olt and Mureș Valleys⁶, being situated near Visa brook, 2 km upstream from Ocna Sibiului. The inhabitants of this settlement preserved a traditional behavior which can be seen everywhere, from the specific typology of the everyday objects, to the construction style of their houses⁷. Traditional Norico-pannonian style pottery is dominant in all the archaeological complexes. One of the main pottery types found in this site is the three-legged bowl, *Dreifußschale*. Also, typical Celtic style ornamentation of pottery, made with a comb or a broom, *Kammstrich* and *Besenstrich*, are preferred. It is very clear that a part of this

traditional pottery it is produced here⁸. Despite preserving, in essence, their traditional way of life, Roman style objects were acquired from the regional markets, the Romanization process is undergoing.

From the beginning of the archaeological research at Ocna Sibiului - *Fața Vacilor / La Făgădău* an important question emerged: when those Celts arrived in the region? To answer at this question, establishing the beginning of the settlement has become an important objective for the archaeological team. The researches from 2018 and 2019 seems to provide new information for completing this task.

In the archaeological campaign of 2018, in section S 22, were observed the traces of a wooden house, its investigations being continued in 2019 with a new section S 24. After we finish the research, we observed that the house dimensions are 2,54x2,05 m. The house is almost perfectly orientated after the cardinal points, the smallest walls are positioned N-S and the biggest to E-W. We had the surprise to find in the western part of the house a coin, an AS, issued by emperor Tiberius in the honour of his adoptive father Augustus⁹. This coin has the following characteristics:

TIBERIVS: AVGVSTVS

No.	Denomination	Mint	Reference	Date	Axis	Weight	Size
1	AS	Roma	RIC I ² , 81	15-16 22-23 34-37 ¹⁰	6	9,10 g	27,7x26,4 mm
Av. DIVV[S AVGVS]TVS PATER; Rv. S-C / PROVIDENT							

Finding place: S24/2019, C 7, -0,80 m, on the house ground.

Until 2019 all the coins found on site area were issues of emperors from the Antonine Dynasty:

NERVA

2	DP	Roma	RIC II, 84	97	6	13,40 g	27,5x27,3 mm
Av. [IMP] N[E]R[VA] CAES AVG P M T[R P COS] III P P; Rv. FORTVNA-A[VGV]ST / S-C							

Finding place: S11/2012, C 6, -1,10 m.

HADRIANVS

This coin was cut in half with a chisel, probably to obtain metal for crafting or repair an object. Because of that, the weight was affected.

3	DP fragmented	Roma	RIC II, 600c	119-121	6	7,45 g – pre- served weight	27 mm-?
Av. [IMP CAESAR TRAIANVS HADRI]AN[VS AVG P M TR P COS III]; Rv. MON[ETA AVGVSTI] / S-[C]							

Finding place: S11/2012, C 6, -0,82 m.

³ POPA/DRAGOȘ/PARASCHIVA 2006, 240.

⁴ DRĂGĂNESCU 2006, 13; CIUNTU/VONICA/PASCU 2006, 28.

⁵ POPA 2001, 72.

⁶ POPA 2006, 142; FODOREAN 2006, 274-279.

⁷ PURECE, UNGUREANU 2018, 36.

⁸ PURECE, UNGUREANU 2018, 38; POPA 2011, 34.

⁹ See the plan.

¹⁰ SUTHERLAND 1941, 112; SUTHERLAND 1984, 99 proposed this dating: 22/23-30? but recent analyze concluded that those coins were issued in multiple series between the years: 15-16, 22-23, 24-37, for a clear dating metal analyses being required as we can see the comments below.

ANTONINVS PIVS

4	S	Roma	RIC III, 612	140-144	6	25,33 g	32,2x31,8 mm
Av. ANTONINVS AVG-PIVS P P TR P COS III; Rv. OPI - AVG / S C							

Finding place: S2B/2006, C 9, -0,70 m.

5	S	Roma	RIC III, 778	145-161	6	25,69 g	31x30,9 mm
Av. ANTONINVS AVG-PIVS P P TR P COS IIII; Rv. S-C							

Finding place: S11/2012, C 1, -0,50 m.

As we can see above, the coin struck by Tiberius for Augustus appear as a strange object in the Antonine Dynasty issues row. Tiberius' bronze commemorative coin series for Augustus, coins with no elements that allow a direct dating¹¹, played a special role in legitimizing the transfer of power. He pursued an intense policy to promote himself as the true successor of Augustus, issuing a significant number of bronze coins with the image of his adoptive father associated with symbols and legends connected with the Augustus' legacy¹². Seven reverse types were made in association with an obverse that marks the apotheosis of Augustus by rendering the emperor's radiated head¹³ and bearing the legend DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER. Remarkable from this series are those coins with a temple on the reverse which overlaps the legend PROVIDENT. The minting of these coins must be related to the inauguration of the altar dedicated to *Providentia Augusta* and the erection of a statue dedicated to Germanicus by *sodales augustales*, all those acts being associated with the wise choice of succession by Augustus through the pair Tiberius-Germanicus. Providence is closely connected to the need for ensuring the eternity of the Empire, Augustus' inspiration being the source of subsequent prosperity¹⁴. Providence becomes an attribute of the emperors, being transmitted starting with Augustus¹⁵. Augustus' providence seems to be more relevant as he was associated with Jupiter¹⁶. It is possible that in connection with the inauguration of the altar dedicated to *Providentia Augusta* in June 26, 15 AD, event that was possible accompanied by the first distributions of *asses* dedicated to Augustus, DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER, with the temple on the obverse and the legend PROVIDENT¹⁷. Although, from seven types minted by Tiberius for Augustus with the legend on obverse DIVVS AVGVSTVS PATER four are close related with the cult of Augustus practiced on the Palatine¹⁸. The metal composition seems to indicate the possibility to have three issues for type RIC I², 81:15-16 AD, 22-23 AD and 34-37 AD¹⁹.

¹¹ SCOTT 1982, 436.

¹² BARRANDON/SUSPÈNE/GAFFIERO 2010, 164.

¹³ CALOMINO 2015, 57-58.

¹⁴ BÉRANGER 1960, 481.

¹⁵ BÉRANGER 1960, 481, 483, 484; BOND 1957, 153.

¹⁶ FISHWICK 1992, 244-245.

¹⁷ BARRANDON, SUSPÈNE, GAFFIERO 2010, 166-167.

¹⁸ SCOTT 1982, 442; FISHWICK 1992, 246.

¹⁹ BARRANDON, SUSPÈNE, GAFFIERO 2010, 159-161.

Even if we know commemorative coins issued by Tiberius for his adoptive father in Dacia, a clear archaeological context is unknown for many of them, being very difficult to determine when the coin was lost. Even then, it is very clear that almost all these coins are associated with the earliest levels of roman habitation in Dacia.

COMMEMORATIVE COINS ISSUED BY TIBERIUS FOR AUGUSTUS WERE ATTESTED AT:

1. Alba Iulia (Alba County) – *Apulum* – *Pretorium consularis* – 2 AS²⁰. From the buildings and the baths excavated by Béla Csérni²¹ comes two *asses*, one type RIC I², 81 and another type RIC I², 83, found in 1905 and 1892²². The last one is discovered in the diggings²³ but we don't have clear information regarding the archaeological context.

2. Buciumi (Sălaj County) – 3 AS²⁴. One comes from the *praetorium*, room J, type RIC I², 81, another one from barrack 1²⁵, type unknown because of its poor preservation²⁶. The third one was a stray find, type RIC I², 81²⁷. Phases Ia and Ib are related with the earthen phase, N. Gudea consider that the coins of Tiberius discovered in archaeological context was lost in the connection with phase Ia, dated between 106-114²⁸. We don't have clear details regarding those archaeological contexts²⁹, the coin found at the surface seems to suggest that some of them could be removed from the initially position due to the later interventions on the fort.

3. Drobeta-Turnu Severin (Mehedinți County) – *Drobeta* – 1 AS³⁰. Unfortunately, we don't have detailed archaeological information regarding this coin: type RIC I², 81³¹. Taking in account the numismatic spectrum of Drobeta and the archaeological realities, was concluded that the coins issued until the Trajan reign have to be part of the monetary

²⁰ MUNTEANU 2017, 165.

²¹ GĂZDAC/SUCIU/ALFÖLDY-GĂZDAC 2009, 95.

²² GĂZDAC/SUCIU/ALFÖLDY-GĂZDAC 2009, 95.

²³ GĂZDAC/SUCIU/ALFÖLDY-GĂZDAC 2009, 95.

²⁴ MUNTEANU 2017, 175.

²⁵ The coin depth suggests an earlier layer, the defence ditch being part of the earthen phase of fortification.

²⁶ GĂZDAC/PRIPON 2012, 45.

²⁷ GĂZDAC/PRIPON 2012, 45.

²⁸ GUDEA 1997, 27.

²⁹ GĂZDAC/PRIPON 2012, 10.

³⁰ MUNTEANU 2017, 191.

³¹ GĂZDAC *et alli* 2015, 144; MUNTEANU 2017, 191.

circulation from the beginning of roman Drobeta³².

4. Gilău (Cluj County) – fort – 3 AS³³. For two coins the type is: RIC I², 81, one found in S 21, –2 m, in the ditch of the wooden principia and other in S 29, m 7, –0.50 m³⁴. The third one, found in S 20, m 41.30, –0.95 m, have a poor preservation but it is, after the description, type RIC I², 81³⁵. This last one was found in an interesting context, was associated with coins from Trajan and Philippus I³⁶. In this situation we have to take in account the various depths on which those coins were found³⁷. In this group of coins from Gilău it's possible to have some that can be linked with the beginning of the fort, Trajan's reign, as the case of the first one mentioned above.

5. Moigrad (Sălaj County) – *Porolissum – the custum house* – 1 AS³⁸. The coin type is RIC I², 81 and was found in barrack 1, S 2, m 34-35, -0,30 m³⁹. It was observed that the coins issued from the Republican period until Trajan's reign are associated with *fibulae* and *terra sigillata* pottery used at the beginning of the building existence, probably between 110-120⁴⁰.

6. Orșova (Mehedinți County) – *Dierna – in the roman city area* – 1 AS⁴¹. The information regarding this coin is scarce, being made just some supposition regarding the moment of losing⁴².

7. Sarmizegetusa (Hunedoara County) – *Ulpia – Amphitheatre* – 1 AS⁴³. The coin is type RIC I², 71-73 or 80-83?, found at the West Gate⁴⁴ with unknown archaeological context. We have to mention the D. Alicu's observation that the majority of coins recovered from the amphitheatre area were lost when the monument was built⁴⁵. The coins issued until Trajan's reign are associated by Alicu with the wooden phase who was erected short after the conquer of Dacia⁴⁶. According to another opinion some coins issued by the emperors from Julio-Claudian dynasty are associated with the stone faze of the amphitheatre⁴⁷.

– *Forum* – 2 AS⁴⁸. Both coins were found in the *forum* courtyard, context 9 and 13, first one is type RIC I² 83 and the second RIC I² 81-83⁴⁹. Those coins are related with the Trajan's reign period⁵⁰.

– Temple? (EM 24) – 2 AS⁵¹. One coin was found in the filling layer (RIC I², 80⁵²), another, RIC I² 81-83, in M 17,

“the 5 m extension towards the peripheral wall of the temple of Aesculapius and Hygea”⁵³.

– Temple Silvanus – 1 AS. This coin is type RIC I² 72⁵⁴.

– EM 22 – 1AS. The coin type is probably RIC I², 80⁵⁵.

– Museum Sarmizegetusa – 1 AS. RIC I², 80⁵⁶.

8. Stolniceni (Vâlcea County) – *Buridava* – 1 AS. The coin type is RIC I² 72⁵⁷ and was discovered in oldest layer of the settlement connected with the Trajan's reign period⁵⁸.

9. Turda (Cluj County) – *Potaissa* – 1 AS. The coin is type RIC I² 80 and comes from a region situated on *Dealul Cetății* hill situated outside of the fort⁵⁹.

As we have seen, even if are a lot of problems regarding the chronology of the archaeological complexes in which those coins were found, some being stray finds, the moment of losing for the majority of coins is related with the earliest levels of the roman habitation in Dacia, therefore with Trajan's reign period. It is clear the dominance of the types with altar on reverse: RIC I², 81 and RIC I², 80, in the group of Divus Augustus coins found on sites.

Of course, in the case of the coin found at Ocna Sibiului-*Fața Vacilor/La Făgădău* we start from the *terminus post quem*, but is very possible that the coin issued by Tiberius for Divus Augustus to be lost in the time of Trajan or maybe at the beginning of Hadrian's reign, situation suggested also by the position of the house in which the coin was discovered and by the general archaeological situation of the area⁶⁰. This fact seems to be sustained, also, by the other such discoveries from Dacia shortly presented above. It is clear that this house was in use before the coin was lost. May be this discovery a clue that those colonists founded the settlement from Ocna Sibiului- *Fața Vacilor-La Făgădău* in time of Trajan? Probably, for a clear view on the beginnings of the Norico-Pannonians settlers presence in the Ocna Sibiului region, new research will be undertaken in the *Fața Vacilor-La Făgădău* site. Now we have a clear view over the link between the colonists and the coins minted by Julio-Claudian dynasty and a possible confirmation to the supposition that an important part of such coins arrived in Dacia as part of the colonists' inventory⁶¹.

³² GĂZDAC *et alli* 2015, 25.

³³ MUNTEANU 2017, 202.

³⁴ GĂZDAC/ISAC 2007, 149.

³⁵ GĂZDAC/ISAC 2007, 150.

³⁶ GĂZDAC/ISAC 2007, 44.

³⁷ GĂZDAC/ISAC 2007, 149, 155, 156, 180.

³⁸ MUNTEANU 2017, 222.

³⁹ GUDEA 1996, 279; GĂZDAC/GUDEA 2006, 54.

⁴⁰ GĂZDAC/GUDEA 2006, 27.

⁴¹ MUNTEANU 2017, 235.

⁴² CHIȚESCU/POENARU BORDEA 1981-1982, 183.

⁴³ MUNTEANU 2017, 247.

⁴⁴ GĂZDAC/COCIȘ 2004, 34.

⁴⁵ ALICU 1997, 239.

⁴⁶ ALICU 1997, 101.

⁴⁷ DIACONESCU 2004, 100.

⁴⁸ MUNTEANU 2017, 249.

⁴⁹ GĂZDAC/COCIȘ, 44.

⁵⁰ GĂZDAC/COCIȘ, 21; PISO *et alii* 2006, 70, 72; OPREANU 2012, 116, 118, 120.

⁵¹ MUNTEANU 2017, 249.

⁵² GĂZDAC/COCIȘ, 44 - number 6, attributed to the coin, is possible a

typing error because at this RIC number it is mentioned a gold *quinarius*, the correct number according to the picture, pl. III, 81, is 80.

⁵³ GĂZDAC/COCIȘ 2004, 52.

⁵⁴ GĂZDAC/COCIȘ 2004, 52.

⁵⁵ GĂZDAC/COCIȘ, 52 – possible the same situation as described at note 51.

⁵⁶ GĂZDAC/COCIȘ 2004, 52.

⁵⁷ PURECE 2007, 102.

⁵⁸ BICHIR 1982, 44.

⁵⁹ MACREA 1928-1932, 128; PÎSLARU 2009, 221.

⁶⁰ The general archaeological situation of the site will be soon published.

⁶¹ ARDEVAN 2006, 154-155; GĂZDAC 2010, 41; MUNTEANU 2017, 112.

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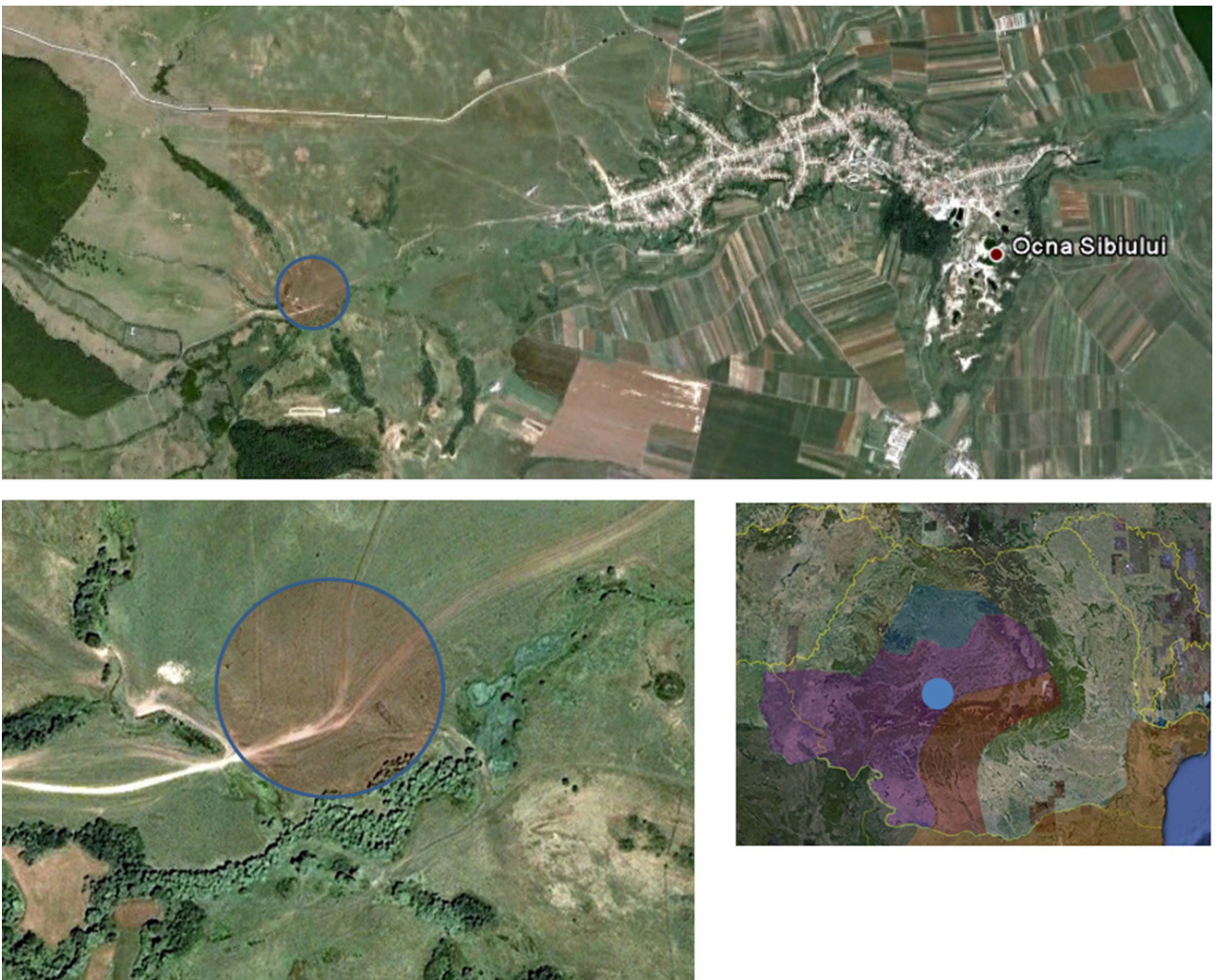


Fig. 1. Ocna Sibiului-Fața Vacilor-La Făgădău - site location.



Fig. 2. Ocna Sibiului-Fața Vacilor-La Făgădău – zone with archaeological excavations.

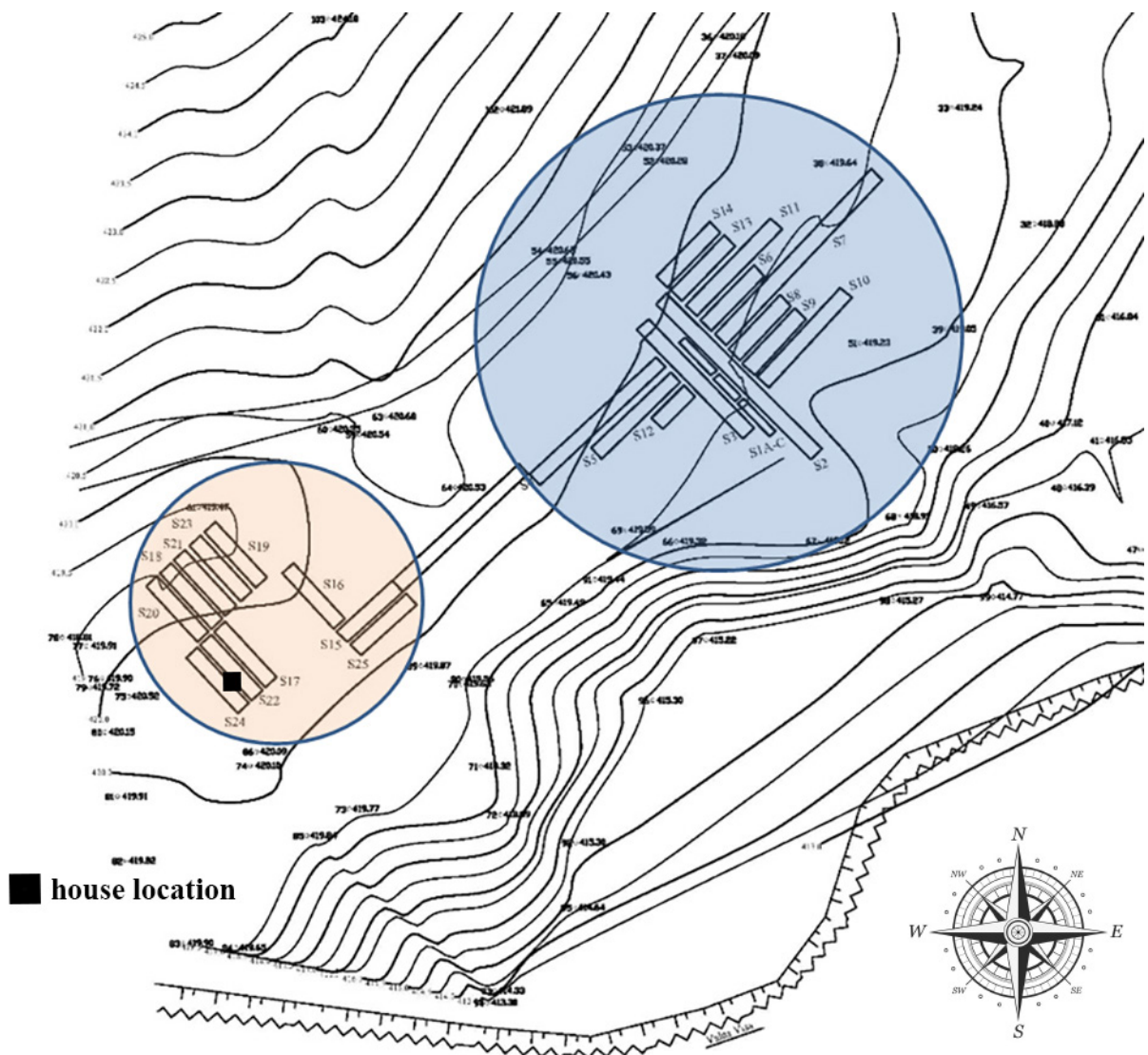


Fig. 3. Ocna Sibiului-Fața Vacilor-La Făgădău - plan of the archaeological excavations.

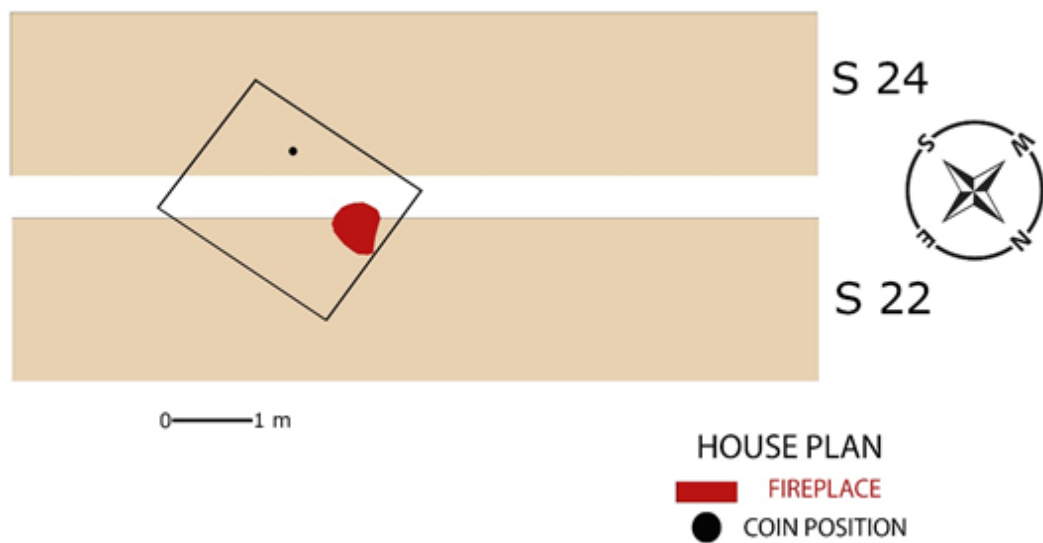


Fig. 4. The house plan and the Divus Augustus coin finding spot.



Fig. 5. The house with Divus Augustus coin in S 22 and S 24.

TIBERIVS: DIVVS AVGVSTVS



1

NERVA



2

HADRIANVS



3

ANTONINVS PIVS



4

5

Fig. 6. Coins from Ocna Sibiului-Fața Vacilor-La Făgădău Site.